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## ABSTRACT

A study examined the process of putting together a class play and assessed how the performance of the play affected the self-esteem of a first-grade class. Subjects, 21 students representing diverse demographic factors, completed two self-esteem measures (a self-evaluation instrument and an interview) before and after the theater production. Over a 2-week period, the students cast the parts, made the props and invitations, studied theatrical vocabulary, memorized their lines (each student had a speaking part), mastered the elements of theater-like expression, conducted a dress rehearsal, and performed the play for other first-grade classes and for parents. Results indicated that, as measured by both instruments: (1) the self-esteem of the Afro-American students increased after the production, but not to an extent greater than the increase in self-esteem of the white students; (2) the self-esteem of female students rose more than that of the male students; and (3) the self-esteem of the class as a whole rose. (Contains 54 references and 2 tables of data.) (RS)

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ART IN THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS:  
IT'S MORE THAN FINGERPAINTING

A Study of Theater Art's Effect on First Graders' Self-Esteem

University of Virginia  
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Spring 1994  
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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Reading primers, rote drill and practice, dunce capped students sitting in the corner...in today's society these educational techniques are basically obsolete. As schools understandably make such tools and procedures a thing of the past, they continue to search for new, innovative, effective ways of enriching and completing the education of America's youth.

Theater art is beginning to break ground as one such tactic. More and more, teachers are using theater in their classrooms and, in doing so, are wearing the hats of director, producer, script writer, and caster. The small scale on which theater art is really used, though, may be attributed to the teachers' unfamiliarity with these roles. As teachers understand the benefits of theater art, they may become more open to using drama in the classroom.

Schools will only welcome theater art as an integrated part of the curriculum when its value as an educational instrument has been ascertained. To gain validity as an educational instrument, theater art must promote academic achievement. As this paper later documents, a known contributor to academic achievement is high self-esteem. "Young children feel smart as long as they feel they are mastering tasks or making progress." (Nicholls & Miller, 1984) "Self-esteem might be thought of as the sine qua non of the healthy personality. The importance of high self-

esteem simply cannot be overstated," says Kohn. (1986)

The purpose of this study is to examine the process of putting together a class play and then to assess how the performance of the play affects the self-esteem of a first grade class. The hypothesis for this study is that total immersion in theater art will raise the self-esteem of the first-graders.

The treatment involves all phases of a class play's production by first grade students: the casting of parts; the making of the props and invitations; the study of theatrical vocabulary; the memorization of lines; the mastering of elements of theater like expression, volume, movement, inflection, and positioning; the dress rehearsals; and the final performance for other first grade classes and parents. The measuring device used for gauging self-esteem is made up two complementary parts, as explained in Chapter Three.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The body of research on this topic carries some powerful implications. Self-esteem, defined by Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary as "a confidence and satisfaction in oneself; self respect," is indeed confirmed as a central contributor to students' academic achievement. Maslow observed that "satisfaction of the self esteem need leads to feelings of self-

confidence, worth, strength, capability, and adequacy, of being useful and necessary." (1970) Accordingly, in an effort to resolve theater art as a viable way of elevating self-esteem, projects currently involving theater art in classrooms call for evaluation.

Traditionally, theater art in public school systems from Philadelphia to rural Alabama (Cohen, 1981), from California to West Virginia (Binder, 1989), from Indiana to cosmopolitan New York (Moriarty, 1988) have been limited to either extremely gifted (UMI, 1990) or, contrarily, disabled students; exiled to either summer (Lamb, 1988) or Saturday enrichment programs (Davidowitz, 1988); acted out either by thimble puppets and marionettes (Adams, 1984) or advanced high school students (Moore, 1988). Typically, the programs are restricted to extracurricular activities, allotted only a meager portion of students' already stretched out and divided time. For students with too much free time on their hands, drama steps in through the door of Latchkey programs. (Los Angeles City Council, 1989) Even these "filler" programs come under fire, as evaluators ask despairingly, "Drama for troubled young people...is it worth the fight?" (Pearson-Davis, 1988)

When theater does earn a place within the four walls of the elementary school classroom, its greatest benefit, raising the self-esteem of the students involved, is sometimes sadly buried under a mass of academic causes. These causes are not unadmirable, but improvements in academics is actually a secondary

repercussion of theater art, after the improvements in self esteem are made. Once the child's self-concept has been formed and the confidence in his or her abilities fortified, then the academics will readily follow. (Marsh, Byrne, & Shavelson, 1988) If theater art is expected to immediately jump-start academic improvement, theater art's real power as a catalyst for a child's self-esteem is lost.

The occasional classroom does allude to self-esteem as an objective of theater art, but often this occurs in a context that smothers its essence under a blanket of academic superfluity. The National Association for the Education of Young Children comes the closest to pinpointing self-esteem as the direct benefit of theater art, though still intertwining it with academic baggage, by stating that drama is "a highly effective tool in the development of social, emotional, physical, and cognitive abilities...the four categories of development that early childhood curriculum should address." (Brown, 1988)

Directly correlating self-esteem improvements to theater art verifies self-esteem as a basis for theater programs. Some educators come close to naming self-esteem as the chief outcome of theater art by asserting that theater art "nurtures and develops both individual and group skills." Without a more specific connection between theater art and the skills it develops, though, one is still left to wonder what definitive factor underlies the gain in these skills. Self-esteem is the unmentioned bridge of this gap.

Self-esteem is a known contributor to academic success. (Revicki, 1982) A number of studies documenting its impact on students performances leave little room for doubt. "Research indicates that children with more stable self-concepts have a more accurate grasp of their academic ability and perform better academically." (Moeller, 1993) School systems continue their attempts to act on this, and "clearly, raising children's self-esteem has become a high priority item for educators." (Moeller)

Theater art's responsibility for this self-esteem is surprisingly unsubstantiated in the context of the inclusive elementary school classroom. Looking at success stories of independent theater art organizations founded on attempts to improve students' self-esteem leads one to question the separation of theater art from the public school environment.

Descriptions of these examples testify to their success. City Hearts, a community based program in Los Angeles begun in January of 1985, uses theater to link children to the elderly. In this setting, "involvement in the arts develops self-esteem, confidence, and discipline in children and helps reconnect the elderly to society." (Mehuron, 1990) Comments of participants in Gateway II, a South Carolina theater arts program, clearly exhibit an abundance of self-esteem gleaned from the program. "The artists make you feel good. They care about us. You feel so good." (Karges-Bone, 1990) Programs such as these need not exist either apart from schools geographically or during off-hours time wise. They prove that theater art can build self-

esteem in students and so they legitimize the installation of theater arts programs in America's public schools.

While a fair number of schools in the United States do espouse minimal programs for theater art, they seem to side-step self-esteem as a primary objective. Unfortunately, the limited objectives of "improving verbal communication skills" (Hayes, 1989) and "helping kids retain story plots" (Knipping, 1993) do not address the "whole-person" of the student. Too frequently, schools base their entire theater art programs on such singular objectives. True, "drama encourages a reflective awareness of language...and facilitates linguistic and cognitive process," (Verriour, 1986) but drama's capability of improving students' self-images and performances extends beyond the boundaries of the language arts program. Lacking the all-encompassing practicality that a marks a self-esteem oriented program, these programs essentially miss the boat in their application (or lack thereof) of theater art. Rather than jumping immediately from drama to chosen content area, a theater art program built namely on self-esteem development can in turn empower its students to achieve in any discipline.

Schools which have used Gardner's (1983) seven intelligences have found that many more of their students have succeeded in curriculum modeled around these ways of knowing. (Ellison, 1992; Hoerr, 1992) These intelligences are:

- Intra-interpersonal (self-confidence)
- Inter-personal (relationships)



- Linguistic (reading, writing, speaking)
- Logical-mathematical (math, visual, problem solving)
- Spatial (visual arts, geometry)
- Body-kinesthetic (dance, coordination)
- Musical (vocal, instrumental)

Whereas most schools emphasize only the Linguistic and Logical-mathematical areas typically stressed by standardized tests (Hoerr), schools that incorporate theater art can treat all seven of the intelligences through the production of a play.

The format of a theater art curriculum concurs with the research of Aronson, Blaney, Stephan, Sikes and Snapp who discovered that self-esteem was affected in a positive manner when children engaged in group rather than individual learning. (1978) Their studies found that children with low self-esteem gained the most by learning in collaboration with others.

Gardner (1983) gives another good reason for addressing the interpersonal intelligences of very young children: the racial prejudice and intolerance that influence our society in such a destructive way commands the attention of educators. Currently, some schools incorporate multicultural education which theater art can magnify and which can enhance the self-esteem of minority children. (Eisner, 1993)

Thus, as a theater arts program builds self-esteem in its students, it becomes a foundation upon which to build academic conquests. Some schools do directly approach their students'

lack of self-esteem by supplying a theater art program to specifically target this need. Sadly, though, they restrict their efforts to the physically handicapped (Crain, 1989), mentally disabled (Miller, Rynders, & Schleien, 1993), or severely emotionally disturbed students. (Malmgren, 1985) These are usually older students, spot-lighted after years and years of "burdensome" attendance in their districts. (Postman, 1990)

Middle or high school students selected for their already full-blown identity crises are common recipients of such programs' energies. (Harland, 1990) Theater art is then a post-intervention, rather than a proactive method. Such is also the case in schools boasting theater art programs intended to remedy the language barriers of ESL (Saldana, 1992) and deaf (Mooneyhan, 1992) students. As restricted as these theater art programs may be, they help mainstream elementary school students in one important way: they are windows through which educators can witness the positive impact of theater art on children's self-esteem.

Theater arts programs face non-stop funding battles and incessant doubting of their worth. Enduring such a barrage of persecution leaves theater art proponents craving a more direct verification of its value. (Goldberg, 1982) An investigation of active theater arts programs reveals that the schools which experience success with their programs are required to project a constant rationalization of their merit. For example, members of CTAA, or Children's Theatre Association of America, continually

beg for sponsorship as they strive "to develop a national climate in which theatre is an important part of the lives of young people." (Wright, 1984)

Proving theater art increases self-esteem in young people will give the programs a measure of ammunition against its skeptics. Theater art remains in the line of fire; meanwhile the deliberations circumscribe the real heart of the matter. The self-esteem of the students is repeatedly ignored. Without a central attainable objective to back it up, theater art will remain an extraneous element in America's education system...the first element cut in a tightened budget (Harris, 1992), the first item crossed from the list when standardized tests and national assessments barge in. (Gollobin, 1992) "The back to the basics movement and a lack of trained teachers, time and money threaten drama programs." (Pearson-Davis) A firmly established, firmly defended mainstream elementary theater art program whose driving force is to uplift children's self-esteem is a rarity.

However, if the long history of children's theater art is an indication of their future endurance, the self-esteem of children has time to garner deserved nurturing. The first theater art program to center its curriculum around the self-concept of the child began in 1935 under the Federal Theater Projects and was known as Children's Theatre. Although it lasted only until 1939 the program set the stage for future theater arts programs who would espouse its motive "to help children's awareness of self." (Kerns, 1990) More than a mere flash in the pan, Children's

Theater's brief four years fathered offspring such as the Centre for Creative Arts, founded in 1937 and still effectively concentrating on the self-esteem of young children. (Moss, 1981)

Its next phase in history dramatically advanced theater art by merging it with children via their formal education. This union evolved in the mid 1960's when "thousands of small alternative schools sprang up across the United States." Under the guidance of John Holt, the National Coalition of Alternative Community Schools, formed in 1976, officially endorsed "children's theater in education." (Leue, 1992) This endorsement propelled theater art in public schools where programs such as those reviewed earlier continued to tread water in the fringes of mainstream curriculum.

Some, however, are getting it right. Programs under the umbrella organization CHART foster theater art initiatives in American public schools and attempt to earn them a more central position in the curriculum. The last decade has witnessed programs through Collaboratives for Humanities and Arts Teaching catapult into American education. Amidst the range of CHART'S scholastic enterprises, the organization embraces children's self-esteem as a primary component of its curriculum. (The Rockefeller Foundation, 1983)

An answer to the "Back to the Basics" movement of the 1950's, CHART's conception stemmed from a study done by The Rockefeller Foundation, the results of which mourned the absence of appropriate humanities education in public schools. (The

Rockefeller Foundation) As a non-profit organization, CHART began to instill a "spirit of renewal" in schools where it viewed the academic focus as too narrow and the expectations and the students' morale as too low. (The Rockefeller Foundation) Grounded in its "support of the fullest development of all children," CHART hinges its academic gains on the self-esteem of the children who achieve them. (The Rockefeller Foundation) The full integration of theater art into every project CHART installs distinguishes this organization from some of the less promising counterparts discussed earlier.

As part of Rockefeller's "School Reform" effort, CHART supports Dr. James Comer's School Development Programs, and currently sustains 14 chapters nationwide. (The Rockefeller Foundation) A closer look at some of these chapters reveals the enormous potential theater art projects hold for children. Operating in the Pittsburgh Public School District since 1988 and supported by Harvard Project Zero and the Educational Testing service, Arts PROPEL is a branch of CHART which is "based on theories about the important of the arts as a way of thinking." (The Rockefeller Foundation) This "way of thinking" refers to a method of cultivating self-esteem in its students through

- the students' perception and appreciation of their own work, and...
- the students' reflection on their learning and assessment of their growth. (The Rockefeller Foundation)

A second CHART project called INHABITING OTHER LIVES began

in Dade County Florida Public Schools in 1989 under a partnership with United Teachers of Dade/Monroe Teacher Education Center.

(The Rockefeller Foundation) There, a former Dade County Superintendent recognized the danger his students' self-esteem was in and so called for a program featuring theater as a means to address this in the wide span of schools under his jurisdiction. (The Rockefeller Foundation)

HUMANITAS, yet another outreach of CHART, has been placing teams in 37 of the district's 49 inclusive public schools in Los Angeles, California since 1986. (The Rockefeller Foundation) One way HUMANITAS has secured itself as a booster of self-esteem - 900 students in 15 of its belonging schools are "producing and performing contemporary opera written for them." (The Rockefeller Foundation) Through this theatrical endeavor, students have gained a positive sense of self-esteem to carry with them throughout the rest of their schooling and life. Says one participant, "The program helped me find out what I want for myself - who I am, what I enjoy doing, what I can make into a profession." (The Rockefeller Foundation)

Perhaps the most exemplary of CHART'S efforts towards students' self-esteem is REACH, or Rural Education Alliance for Collaborative Humanities. Since 1987, this South Carolina based project has been initiating student control over self-concept. The chapter has a Cross Age Tutoring Program whose results meet its expectations with a "a rise in self-esteem." (The Rockefeller Foundation) Indeed "through its innovative work in many schools

around the state...REACH has grown to be a catalyst in South Carolina." (The Rockefeller Foundation) The South Carolina Humanities Council offered to serve as official sponsor and fiscal agent for a massive statewide effort to cooperatively spread theater art.

The plan was instigated by research at Clemson University; the school is now one of 19 collaborators and supporters of the program. (The Rockefeller Foundation) REACH extends into 28 districts throughout the state, but the real tribute to its success comes not through the expansive nature of the program but rather from the individuals within its bounds. (The Rockefeller Foundation) Comments one student, "It helped you learn more about yourself;" adds another, "It makes you kind of proud." (The Rockefeller Foundation)

Having gained nation wide recognition, REACH now receives praise from education and theater journals alike and so further demonstrates the common threads bonding these two fields. Known to make drastic improvement in the self-esteem of its children, REACH is applauded by psychological and developmental experts. One reviewer "urges its use in all contexts," while another refers to a REACH exposition attended in 1991 as a "stunning display" and gives REACH a "standing ovation." (Barone, 1991)

Prefacing his judgement with the comment that "the REACH exposition was a bold attempt at realizing a vision, actually turning it into reality," this Associate of Arizona's Division of Curriculum and Instruction declares, "My hope is that other

educators may find inspiration in the decision of these South Carolinians to step forward from the wishful backstage...into the spotlight of real performance." (Barone)

Various resources offer specific techniques to turn this ideal into a reality. One such book, Creative Drama, "presents activities designed to enhance components of a healthy self-concept in elementary school children" in a chapter-by-chapter, very readable format. (Renard & Sockol, 1987) Other published works entitled such explanatory names as "The New Playmaking: The Latest in the Integration of the Arts in Education" readily follow suit. (1993)

Perhaps Educational Theatre Association members speak most eloquently on theater art's promotion of student self-esteem. At the 1992 National Convention, sponsors discussed "the transformative power and the potential of theater in the schools to create radical change in the way children learn, think and feel about themselves and their ability to shape their own worlds." (Hartfield, 1993)

### CHAPTER III

#### DESIGN OF THE STUDY

##### DEMOGRAPHICS AND BACKGROUND

The classroom involved in this study consists of a diverse student population. Comprised of 21 students, the class harmonizes a wide variety of demographic factors into a resulting



"melting pot" of children. There are seven children whose race is Afro-American and 14 who are white (one being directly from Russia.) The boys (eleven in number) and girls (ten) range in age from five to seven years and exhibit a wide intellectual range. The class spans from relatively fluent readers to those lacking the concept of a word. Standardized test scores fall between well below average to extremely gifted.

The children come from an assortment of family backgrounds. Some live with both parents, while some have parents who are divorced, separated, or widowed. The students reside in both affluent and under-privileged areas, and the respective family incomes vary accordingly. The children receive differing amounts of attention at home, and have from 0 to three older and younger siblings. Some are nourished by extraordinary parental support; others are not.

The scope of their prior theatrical experience is vital to this study. Individual "reports" are frequently given in front of the class; art work is shared on an impromptu basis; stories are read to partners; a reader's theatre is executed at the beginning of the school year. Through music class, students give performances in the form of a choir. Notably, though, none of the students had ever participated in a full-fledged dramatic production that included individual speaking parts, practicing over a lengthy period of time and performing on a stage with costumes, props, and an outside audience.

If absences prevented a student from completing any part of

a self-esteem assessment, his or her name was omitted from that assessment's data table. For each of the two assessment methods described in the following section, three children did not complete the control and/or variable phase of the process. Therefore, only 18 of the 21 children's names will appear on each of the two assessment's final data tables.

## MEASURES

Two methods were used to measure the self-esteem of the students in the study. A description of each method follows. Method One was developed through the collaboration of myself and fellow student Kathy Husband. Since her project investigated the effects of visual art on first grade students' self-esteem, it called for a method of assessing self-esteem at the first grade level as well. As partners, Husband I designed a method to quantify the students' own perceptions of their abilities. This method assesses the overall self-concept of the student rather than the self-esteem specifically tied to theatrical ability. Three first grade teachers surveyed the method prior to its execution and deemed the method developmentally appropriate.

To begin this assessment, I posed to the students the question, "What kinds of things can a person be good at?" As teacher, I guided the discussion to insure a well-rounded representation of ideas. A list was brainstormed and written on the board. Those items on the list closely related to one another were joined under appropriate headings. For example, the

students classified basketball, gymnastics, and tee-ball as "sports"; cleaning house, washing dishes, and taking care of siblings were classified as "helping." As students refined the list, activities viewed as less important were eliminated. The total number of items was narrowed down to eight. The eight activities were: art, drawing, reading, music, sports, helping, teaching, meeting people.

These eight activities acted as the labels for the y-axis of a bar graph; each bar bore the name of one activity. The eight bars were situated on top of one another and extended horizontally from the y-axis to the right side of the page. Each bar was actually an empty, elongated rectangle, outlined in black and measuring 14 cm in length. The x-axis of the graph technically represented the degree to which the child felt adept at the particular activity. The x-axis was not labelled on the children's graphs. The title of the graph read "I am [name]. Look what I can do!" The students wrote their own names in the blank. To assist the non-readers of the class, small illustrations accompanied each of the activity labels. The basic diagram of the graph which follows serves as a crude representation. The dotted lines symbolize the outlines of the bars which actually appeared on the children's graphs:

I AM [NAME]. LOOK WHAT I CAN DO!

art

-----

dancing

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reading

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music

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sports

-----

helping

-----

teaching

-----

meeting people

-----

Using their graphs, the students indicated how competent they viewed themselves at each of the designated eight activities. Students colored each bar of the graph to show his or her self-esteem in that area. They began at the far left of the bar and colored toward the right in order to gradually fill up the bar the amount they so chose. The student stopped coloring each bar when the length of its colored section reflected the competence the child felt. For example, if a child viewed him or herself as extremely good in art, the full 14 cm of his or her first empty bar would then be colored in. If he view himself a poor dancer, he would add only a minimal area of color to his second bar. Perhaps it would measure only 2 cm as it extended from the left hand side of the graph (the y-axis). The bars were each colored a different, designated color. The teacher regulated the time interval during which each bar was colored. Each lasted approximately 2 minutes.

This method allowed the students to conduct their self-assessments and communicate their results without dealing in numerical ratings. This entire exercise is done for the first time before the introduction of the theater art element. The results of this initial procedure served as the control of the study. The exercise was then repeated after the final theater art performance. This second set of results served as the variable of the study. Sufficient introductory lessons and ample modeling for the students expedited the task of coloring the bar-graph. Included were group talks focusing on probable standards

of a good helper, a good teacher, a good dancer and so on.

The second method used to measure the self-esteem of the first-grade students consisted of a one-on-one interview with each student. This format was adapted to provide a balance between the "all-around" self-concept of the student which was assessed with the first method and the "theatrical" self-esteem of the student to be assessed in the second method. Also, the level of self-esteem demonstrated in the first method was purely student-determined, while the level of self-esteem in the second method was determined by adult evaluators.

In this second method, a set of three questions was asked of each student. Each question asked the student to verbalize his or her reaction to a proposed situation. One situation was proposed in each of the three questions. Adequate handling of the situation in each of the questions would mandate the dramatic and interpersonal skills acquired through theater art. The questions sequentially increase in their degree of challenge posed to a child's level of self-esteem. The following three questions were used to probe the children's level of self-esteem in relation to theater arts:

- When the teacher asks a question in class, do you like to raise your hand to try to answer it?

- When it is your turn to stand in front of the class and share something you have made, how do you feel?

- If you were in a play in front of the whole school, and you forgot your lines, what would you do? How would you feel?

The questions attempted to use language that was understandable to first grade students with a simple vocabulary and a minimum of clauses and conditionals. The open-ended format of the questions attempted to encourage both realistic and thorough responses on the students' behalf. Occasionally further prompts were warranted and so were documented on the survey dictations. The number of questions (three) reflected the effort toward the creation of a developmentally appropriate survey bearing in mind the attention spans of first grade students. and their ability to grasp multi-faceted gradations.

By having open ended questions, the study hoped to avoid the "invincibility syndrome" children at this age often exhibit. If asked a simple 'yes' or 'no' question such as "Are you good at explaining things?" a first-grade student will most assuredly answer "YES!" As pointed out by first-grade teacher and consultant to the study Nina Ozbey, "Ask them if they've been to Cambodia and 21 children will raise their hands and exclaim, 'YES!'"

Despite this obstacle, though, the levels of self-esteem among first grade students are thought to fluctuate. Although measuring these levels can be a challenge, the levels are not always as infinitely high as is sometimes supposed. Some studies conclude that young children (first and second graders) have unrealistically high self-expectancies and self-esteem. (Miller, 1987; Wigfield & Harold, 1992) Contrarily, others find that although self-perceived intelligence and self-esteem seems to be

linked with effort more than ability among young children, young children are vulnerable to feelings of failure. (Stipek & Daniels, 1988; Licht, 1992)

## ANALYSIS

The first method, which measured self-esteem by using the student-generated bar graphs, was analyzed by assigning a numerical value to the colored length of each bar. To assign this value I actually measured the length of the colored portion of each bar. The student's self-esteem rating for each activity equalled the number of centimeters colored in on his or her bar. As each uncolored bar measured 14 cm in length, the score of 14 represents a completely colored bar and so the highest possible level of self-esteem for that activity. The eight measurements for each child were recorded in a table.

This table listed the eight activities along the invisible y-axis and listed the names of the 21 children across the top of the page (along the x-axis). Identical tables were constructed for both the control and variable data bases. The following graphic illustrates the format of such a control or variable table. (See Diagram 1) Please note, due to the limited column space available horizontally, only four of the 18 names have been listed as headings across the top of the page. The heading "et. al" on the sample indicates that the number of students that provided data for the study was actually more than the four here printed. Again, this is just a sample of the format used to



compile the final table in CHAPTER IV. The students are listed alphabetically by their first name's letter(s). Last names are omitted for the sakes of privacy and protection.

[Diagram 1]

#### METHOD ONE

#### Student Generated Bar Graphs

Numerical Value of Each Activity's Colored Length by Student

	Abigail	Brandon	Darryl	LaToya	Et. al	AVERAGE
art						
dancing						
reading						
music						
sports						
helping						
teaching						
meeting people						
AVERAGE						

For the control and for the variable data set, averages were calculated for each of the eight activities. Then reading horizontally across the bottom row, these scores were entered in the column at the table's right hand-most edge. Averages were also calculated for each individual child to give a collective

score for his or her eight different activities. These numbers were transferred to a table that formed the basis for the results which are discussed in CHAPTER IV of the paper. The student averages from both the control table and the variable table are juxtaposed to form a more concise table of information. (Please refer to RESULTS of METHOD I in next chapter) This table directly compares the "control" assessment's average to the "variable" assessment's average to gauge changes in each student's overall self-concept.

From the 18 students, a calculation was performed to score the whole class' self-esteem before the theater production and the whole class' self-esteem after the production. The data was also analyzed by the categories of both race and gender. To test the research of Aronson, Blaney, Stephan, Sikes, and Snapp (investigators of group-learning's effect on socialization skills) as well as that of Gardner (whose research supports theater art programs for the self-esteem of minority children), the self-esteem averages of the girls in this study were compared to those of the boys, and the self-esteem averages of the Afro-American students were compared to those of the white students.

The second method of the study, the personal interview, was inherently more subjective. To obtain control and variable data, it too was executed both before and after the theatrical production. Following the interviews completion, the responses given in one were necessarily transcribed. Then, to quantify the interview responses, outside evaluators extrapolated the level of

self-esteem projected by each body of responses. For each child's set of three answers, a rating (1-10) was assigned. This indicated the evaluator's view of the demonstrated level of self-esteem. When the evaluators scored each interview, they did not know whether the interview was from the control or the variable set. To prevent any potentially pre-existent biases, the name of the child was kept anonymous as well. The ratings were then adjusted to a 14 point scale, making the results comparable to those of the first method. A 'one' indicates a low level of self-esteem; fourteen indicates a high level. The identical procedure was used both for the control and variable interviews. The control and variable interviews were shuffled before the rankings.

To fortify this method's validity, the study employed inter-rater reliability. (The study used three evaluators rather than one.) The rating process was performed by the three people simultaneously. Each of these people represented a different area of expertise in the study. The first evaluator was myself, the designer of the study. The second was Nina Ozbey, the permanent teacher of the first grade class and a certified authority on Early Childhood Development. The third evaluator was Carol Fox, the school counselor and resident specialist in the self-esteem of children.

After the three evaluators each scored the students' response sets, all of the scores were recorded on a data table. The table listed the three evaluators along the left side of the

table and the names of the 18 participating children across the top of the page. Identical tables were constructed for both the control and variable data bases. The following graphic illustrates the format of such tables. (See Diagram 2) Due to the limit of horizontal space, only four of the 21 names have been listed. The heading "et. al" on the sample indicates that the number of students that provided the study's data was actually more than the four printed here. Please note again that this simply a sample of the format used to compile its corresponding final table found in CHAPTER IV.

[Diagram 2]

#### METHOD TWO

#### Personal Interviews

#### Scores Given Students by Each Evaluator

	Abigail	Brandon	LaToya	Darryl	Et. al
Ozbey					
Fox					
Ward					
AVERAGE					

Again, the "control" average and the "variable" average for each student in Method Two were consolidated onto a single efficient data table. (See RESULTS of METHOD II in next chapter.) To facilitate easy comparisons of the data cells, the

control average and the variable average were juxtaposed on this final table. As was done in Method I, the data was broken down by both race and gender as well. A class average was calculated for the control and for the variable columns.

## DISCUSSION

Gardner's seven intelligences, previously listed, serve as an insightful measuring device of this study's success. To illustrate how each one was addressed by theater art in the study, a brief explication of the particular play used in the study is necessary. To provide each student's self-esteem with an opportunity to improve, I gave a speaking part to every girl and boy in the class. This required a script with a sizable number of parts. With only two weeks to complete the play from start to finish, though, I did not want the speaking parts to be overly cumbersome. Adapting a commonly recited children's tale for our play suited my purposes beautifully.

The narrative chosen consisted of a dialogue between a large number of kitchen gadgets, fixtures, foods, and household critters. Most of the lines in this conversation were simple exclamations or words of encouragement; their ornamental nature allowed me to edit the tale for our own number of 21 parts without really altering the tale's original plot. Honing down the script guaranteed each student at least one line crucial to the plot's advancement. The students could in fact take on additional parts quite easily, as they learned to cover for one

another as "understudies" during absences. Since the story was already a dialogue, modifying it for dramatic format was quite natural. I found the script ideal because of the tale's malleable, captivating, and methodical qualities.

Many sections of the script, namely the lines of the six main characters, lent themselves to choral speaking. This benefitted all students involved. Weaker actors/readers felt the security of a partner's voice during sometimes unsettling line recitation, and stronger students exerted themselves in newfound leadership roles. In fact, perhaps greater effort was required on behalf of the more theatrically inclined students; they had to consciously pace their own flow of lines to insure a harmonious dialogue. In the production, children of every background worked and concentrated together to create a shining performance. Mixed grouping makes a pointed effort toward enabling minority students and students of lower ability to work in a less threatening, more risk free environment. Under these circumstances, self-esteem is more likely to blossom.

Six of the play's more prominent roles frequently had synchronized lines. Two of the six did have significant solo parts which were peppered throughout the play, but many of these two characters' lines were also shared with the other four main characters. Within this core body of six lead characters, two pairs of students functioned in particularly symbiotic relationships. These pairs were not randomly matched. The casting of these parts is particularly profound in this study.

Each of the two pairs was comprised of a low reader and a high one, an Afro-American student and a white one, a girl and a boy. No two traits overlapped between the partners. This gave each demographic characteristic found within the class equal representation in those roles of the play that were particularly likely to raise self-esteem.

Recall Gardner's seven intelligences. The leading one of these was named the Intra-personal intelligence and referred to a child's self-esteem. In this study, the students worked step by step through the production of a play to gain the self-esteem of this Intelligence that the data clearly displays. As the play's production worked to raise the self-esteem of its participants, this paramount intelligence of Gardner's was the first to be fulfilled. With the heightened confidence in place, the students ably produced a play and enjoyed the fruits of their labor. The fulfillment of the other six intelligences followed suit. The play addressed each one of these intelligences in its production.

The Inter-personal (relationship) intelligence was addressed from the onset of the play. The students began to learn their lines using illustrated cue cards. Each student's card contained two pieces of information: 1. a drawing of the character preceding the student's own part with the cue written beside the drawing, and 2. a drawing of the student's own character with his or her proceeding line written beside the drawing.

Students used the visual clue to prompt them to speak at the

correct time. Practicing the play, then, involved a high degree of inter-dependence, much like the domino effect with each student leading his or her classmate to speak in turn. This cuing could occur without the student actually reading his or her cue line. Therefore the students' success in the play was not dependent on his or her reading ability. As professed earlier, reading ability was heavily considered in the casting of the play, but then was no longer pertinent in insuring the play's successful execution.

Inter-personal Intelligence was further addressed through the partnerships established from the play's onset. Students learned the word "cue" and had practiced whispering, "So-and-so, that's your cue." Each boy and girl had a buddy to assist during moments of forgetfulness. Students' pride in their buddies was evidenced by the voluntary practicing done together at times such as lunch and recess. Additionally, the play cultivated relationships between child and parent. Notes sent home at the play's inception, accompanied by copies of the child's cue card(s), encouraged parents to work with their children on these lines at home. Parents were asked to underscore the importance of the play. The welcomed attendance of many generations of parents at the play's final performance cemented in students the importance of the Inter-personal Intelligence factor.

Linguistic Intelligence (reading, writing, speaking) was obviously addressed as the students learned to speak their lines clearly, loudly, and with expression. By the end of the play,



after working with the cue cards for two weeks straight, each student could read his or her line, and usually the cue above it as well. The more advanced readers could read the entire play, and all students could write their character's name. This was done on the invitations they designed and on the props they created too..

A key factor in developing Linguistic Intelligence was the poetic style of the play. Not only was each student's line a rhyme, but one of the rhyming words was always the character's own name. This helped the students memorize their parts with ease and speak them to the tune of a catchy sing-songy rhythm.

Logical-mathematical Intelligence (math, visual, problem solving) was critical in the play's production. The entire plot centered around a problem to be solved. The characters worked together to help a friend through an accident and injury. Also, the students engaged in problem solving tactics when they determined how to attach their cue cards to the backs of their masks (in case of a play emergency!), how to cut eye holes out in the correct positions in the masks, and how to securely affix the handles to the masks.

Spatial Intelligence (visual art, geometry) experiences involved the children in illustrating these masks that then served as their props/costumes. More visual experiences included the children's turns as temporary members of the audience, where they observed the play and helped to arrange the locations of each actor and actress on the stage. The visual experience

culminated with the viewing of a video filmed during the play's final performance.

Body-kinesthetic Intelligence (dance, coordination) was definitely not overlooked by the play. The students spent considerable time learning how to enter and exit the stage, how to take their bow, and how to animate the lines of the play with physical movement. They frequently had to touch one another and rely on their fellow classmate's motions and actions.

Musical Intelligence (vocal, instrumental) was addressed by the play throughout its production. The students worked on their inflection, tone, and pitch while reciting their lines in a sing-song manner. At the play's closing, the students even clapped all together and shouted a unanimous cheer.

Therefore, in addition to both the Linguistic and the Logical-mathematical Intelligences emphasized by standardized tests, the play production addressed the other intelligences Gardner named. Its multi-faceted make-up fostered growth in each area of human being. As the children developed their self-esteem, the tangential Intelligences of Gardner came to fruition. In this way, the theater art production helped mold the all-around well being of the 21 first grade students.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS

#### METHOD I

In Method I, the students themselves evaluated their self-concepts. In this method, the well-rounded, overall self-concept was tested. All but three of the students' self-esteem averages increased between the control and the variable assessments.

(Please refer to included table METHOD ONE - SELF-ESTEEM AVERAGES) Notably, one of these decreases was by a negligible .1 point. The whole class' self-esteem average increased by 1.6 points.

Consistent with the whole class' average increase, the self-esteem of Afro-American students rose 1.3 points. Evidently, the play did improve their self-esteem, but not to an extent remarkably greater than that of the white students (1.8 points). With an 11.2 beginning level of self-esteem, perhaps a dramatic increase in the Afro-American students' self-esteem would not have been either expected or possible.

The females' level of self-indicated esteem rose 2.0 points between the control and the variable assessments. The level of male self-esteem rose 1.5 points. Perhaps the play provided an opportunity for girls to "come out of their shells" while remaining invulnerable under the safety of a prefixed script.

Interestingly, the three activities of the assessment whose averages showed the highest degree of improvement from their

control to their variable scores were indeed those activities directly related to the skills of theater art, and to the skills most emphasized in our own production. "Helping" increased by 1.1 points, "teaching" increased by a stunning 3.9 points, and "meeting people" jumped up a substantial 1.5 points. Each of these elements of the "whole person" requires considerable interpersonal skills and speaking abilities. These were skills specifically addressed and most frequently practiced in the play.

In Method I, the students' self-esteem improvements were within a smaller range than the improvement range of Method II, but all of the preliminary student-determined self-esteem scores were higher than their counterparts in Method II.

The students from the character pairs (Amber and Ryan, Peyton and LaToya) showed gains in self-esteem not exceeding the gains of the individual actors and actresses. Within each pair, the highest gains were attained by the girl.

Method One illustrates a possible flaw in the study when the averages of students such as Ryan are examined. The self-esteem of a child whose precursory level leaves no room for improvement is, scientifically speaking impossible. In Chris and Daniel's cases, the likelihood of an already high level of self-esteem becoming a perfect one in a matter of ten days is quite doubted.

When characteristically quiet members of the class (i.e. Darryl and Brandon) make gains in self-esteem reaching up to 4 points, the introspective data of the initial self-rankings seems accurate. Without introducing the realm of student personality

traits, I will note that the highest leap in self-esteem according to Method I (made by Amanda) did occur in a girl with exceptional meta-cognition.

In the data of most all of the 18 participating students, the lowest ranking activity in the control group remained the lowest ranking activity in the variable group. This occurred with each student's highest ranking activity as well as with the majority of the activities in between.

METHOD ONE: SELF-ESTEEM AVERAGES

A Measurement of the Overall Self-Concept  
(Self-Determined)

STUDENT	CONTROL AVERAGE	VARIABLE AVERAGE
Abigail	9.6	10.1
Amanda	3.4	10.5
Amber	6.0	6.0
Brandon	4.3	8.4
Chris	12.1	14.0
Christopher	9.1	10.5
Colin	6.6	6.1
Daniel	10.9	14.0
Darryl	7.8	10.4
Franchon	12.4	13.0
Hiram	11.6	12.6
Ira	10.1	12.6
Kevin	13.1	12.6
LaToya	11.6	13.8
Nathalie	9.5	10.7
Peyton	10.4	12.0
Ryan	14.0	13.9
Whitney	9.7	11.1
White Students	8.8	10.6
Afro-Americans	11.2	12.5
Females	9.0	11.0
Males	10.0	11.5
WHOLE CLASS	9.6	11.2

## METHOD II

With Method II, the levels of self-esteem increased in all students, save two whose levels remained the same from the control to the variable assessment. (Please refer to included table METHOD TWO - SELF-ESTEEM AVERAGES.) The levels in four of the students increased by 100%!

The two highest gainers this time both were girls. Both were also main characters of the play. Females again showed a higher overall gain, with a 2.6 point increase compared to a 2.0 point increase by the boys. Afro-American students' self-esteem increased by 1.6 points between the control and the variable screening; White students 2.6. In this teacher-rated method, the whole class' gain from control to variable was 2.3 points (.7 points higher than the Method I class gain.)

The different degrees of improvement in the outcomes of Method I and Method II leave the study wondering which is the more accurate of the two methods. Consider the options. One set of figures represents the perceptions of minds only five, six, and seven years old. The second set represents the interpretive opinions of outside observers. As close as an adult evaluator may be to a child, as expert as he or she may be in the field, that adult can never step inside of his or her mind or skin.

The reliability of such an evaluator's ranking can certainly be second-guessed. However, marked differences in self-esteem projections did evolve from the control to the variable interviews. In the pool of control interviews, 16 of the 18

students displayed some sense of timidity when questioned about theater art. However, key words including embarrassed, nervous, scared, frightened, and shy were soon replaced by much braver and more self-confident answers.

The students' confidence evolved into the use of, and sometimes development of, rather advanced theatrical strategies and techniques. Abigail's tactic, should her theater skills falter, was a mature one. She informed the interviewer, "I would say, 'Ira [her buddy], what's my line?' I could put a little note in my brain saying, 'I'm after this person...I'm after this person.'"

Colin hesitated but then affirmed, "I would...if I had a paper I would look at the paper and read off the paper. I would just...I would just think for a while. I can...I would know that I could do it. I would...I could think while it was other people's turn." He added, "I would just ask the person next to me. I could think what rhymes. I could just think of what my part is and what rhymes with that."

Franchon boldly exclaimed, "I would tell someone or think in my head or remember what they said. We practiced for a long time so I wouldn't forget. I won't forget." Hiram smiled, "I help other people and help myself!" Whitney rounded off the comments of the Afro-American students by assuring her interviewer what she would do in the third question's situation. "Go ask you," she claims, "Then everybody would clap!" Without fail the three evaluators in the Method II process detected such



animated certainty.

# METHOD TWO: SELF-ESTEEM AVERAGES

## A Measurement of Theater Related Self-Esteem

(Teacher-evaluated)

STUDENT	CONTROL AVERAGE	VARIABLE AVERAGE
Abigail	8.0	9.8
Amanda	9.3	12.1
Amber	4.2	8.4
Angel	11.7	11.7
Brandon	3.7	6.1
Caroline	7.5	9.3
Chris	5.1	10.7
Christopher	5.6	10.3
Colin	9.8	10.7
Darryl	9.3	9.8
Franchon	9.3	9.8
Hiram	8.4	8.9
J.R.	7.5	7.5
Kevin	4.2	7.5
LaToya	4.7	10.7
Peyton	6.1	8.0
Ryan	5.1	5.6
Whitney	4.5	8.0
White Students	6.5	9.1
Afro-Americans	7.6	9.2
Females	7.4	10.0
Males	6.5	8.5
WHOLE CLASS	6.9	9.2

## SUMMARY

The results of the two methods have been reviewed. Putting them in context with one another captures the essence of this study.

In both Methods I and II, the self-esteem of the Afro-American students increased after the production of the play. Method I saw an increase of 1.3 points. Method II saw an increase of 1.6 points. Eisner tied theater to multi-cultural education and this study backs his recommendation of using theater art to aid with the self-esteem of this student faction.

In both methods, the self-esteem of the female students increased after the production of the play. Method I saw an increase of 2.0 points. Method II saw an increase of 2.6 points. Theater art may very well unlock the doors of socialization outlets that could conquer self-esteem depravity in girls. Whole class average gains registered at 1.6 and 2.3 points respectively.

Both assessment methods show that the self-esteem of the whole class rose. One may speculate as to whether this particular study represents an isolated instance of self-esteem improvement, or represents the promise that theater art itself can fulfill in the way of self-esteem building curriculum.

This study is, regardless, a step toward the steady advancement of research on this topic. As educational practices continue to evolve, perhaps the opening words of this paper now carry with them a new depth of understanding. The study has come

full circle, yet lands further ahead than from where it took off.  
Progress has been made.

Reading primers, rote drill and practice, dunce capped students sitting in the corner...in today's society these educational techniques are basically obsolete. As schools understandably make such tools and procedures a thing of the past, they continue to search for new, innovative, effective ways of enriching and completing the education of America's youth.

Theater art is beginning to break ground as one such tactic. More and more, teachers are using theater in their classrooms and, in doing so, are wearing the hats of director, producer, script writer, and caster. The small scale on which theater art is really used, though, may be attributed to the teachers' unfamiliarity with these roles. As teachers understand the benefits of theater art, they may become more open to using drama in the classroom.

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